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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 005434

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER KS RS

SUBJECT: KOSOVO: RUSSIAN FORECAST FOR "THE DAY AFTER;"

BOSNIA

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns: Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Russia's Kosovo Troika Envoy

Botsan-Kharchenko told us that FM Lavrov is preparing a letter to Rice, FM Steinmeier, and EU Solana raising concern over a possible unilateral Kosovar declaration of independence on December 11. The letter will also underscore the rise of radical Albanian groups in Kosovo and neighboring states, and argue that Kosovar Serbs are resistant to an international presence in Northern Kosovo -- sowing the seeds for a "new Abkhazia." Botsan-Kharchenko saw differences between Kostunica and Tadic that could have relevance after the Serbian presidential elections. He clarified that the GOR did not oppose Office of the High Representative (OHR) measures to strengthen central Bosnian institutions, but rejected HR Lajcak's use of the Bonn Powers over consensus building. While he thought the Republika Srpska's (RS) overall goal was not to secede from Bosnia, the RS leadership's use of a Kosovo precedent was an example of why Russia did not support Kosovo's unilateral independence. End Summary.

Lavrov's Letter

¶2. (C) In a November 16 meeting, Special Envoy for the Balkans Aleksandr Botsan-Kharchenko told us that FM Lavrov was preparing a letter for Rice, FM Steinmeier and EU Solana detailing concerns about next steps in Kosovo. Lavrov will warn against Kosovo's readiness to declare independence on December 11, without allowing time for the contact group or UNSC to discuss the results of the Troika process, and allude again to U.S. encouragement of Kosovar actions that undercut the seriousness of the Troika. Conceding the likelihood of a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI), Botsan-Kharchenko argued that the US should not oppose a reasonable amount of time to analyze the report, and stressed that U.S. influence was essential to restrain Pristina from a precipitous UDI. Noting that European Union unity would be very difficult to achieve in the wake of a UDI, Botsan-Kharchenko argued that Kosovar actions would raise substantial issues over the legality of successor international missions.

¶3. (C) According to Botsan-Kharchenko, Lavrov will also refer to Russian concerns about security in the greater Kosovo neighborhood, noting a rise in the activity of Albanian radical groups both in Kosovo and in Albanian-majority areas in southern Serbia (Presevo Valley) and Macedonia. While Belgrade had pledged that the Serbian military would not be involved in any punitive reaction to UDI, Botsan-Kharchenko said "let's be frank" -- there was evidence of the presence of armed para-military organizations, which Balkan history suggested would be the vehicle for unrest.

¶4. (C) Lavrov will underscore Russia's assessment that the Kosovar Serbs will reject an international presence such as an ESDP mission. Noting the northern enclaves' already separate existence from the south, which was reinforced by Serbian encouragement of an electoral boycott, Botsan-Kharchenko forecast that Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence would produce a "new Abkhazia" -- a constituent element of a country that it repudiated, with the sympathy and financial support of Belgrade. He said that the international presence -- UNMIK, KFOR, and civilians -- plays an integrating role, but there would likely be de facto partition after a UDI. If there was a "day-after scenario," he speculated, this was it for Belgrade. We argued that the international community, Russia included, did not need a "new Abkhazia" and should take steps (i.e. encouraging Kosovar Serb electoral participation) to mediate against this development, but Botsan-Kharchenko did not signal Russian opposition to de facto partition.

¶5. (C) Finally, Botsan-Kharchenko said that Lavrov may also discuss the GOR differences over Ischinger's paper (including the absence of a point refraining the Kosovars from acting unilaterally), while emphasizing Belgrade's proposal for a Hong Kong model.

Tadic and Kostunica

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¶6. (C) Botsan-Kharchenko reiterated his admiration of the Troika's dynamics, noting that all three members were willing to work creatively to find a workable solution. He expressed some regret that the confederation (CIS, or Germany) model had been rejected by both sides, but suggested that there might be some daylight between Kostunica and Tadic. Kostunica, he noted, had rejected the proposal without

MOSCOW 00005434 002 OF 002

hesitation, and reconfirmed his opposition in a letter to FM Steinmeier whereas Tadic had merely expressed disappointment at the Kosovar's rejection of all proposals, including confederation, except independence. While Russia did not seek to exaggerate the point, advisers around Tadic suggested that after next year's presidential elections, he would be able to show more flexibility on Kosovo within the framework of the "common roof" approach to confederation.

Bosnia

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¶7. (C) We expressed concern over the growing crisis in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Belgrade encouragement of Republika Srpska (RS) actions as a tactic to increase pressure on the international community over Kosovo, and the prospect of an unhelpful UNSC presentation by former BS Chairman of the Council of Ministers Spiric. Botsan-Kharchenko replied that Russia had predicted and warned of the possible effect of Kosovo's independence aspirations on RS, but stressed the Russian assessment that secession was not the RS's goal. RS PM Dodik did not seek secession -- either for independence or to join Serbia -- but sought to preserve the Serbian entity in Bosnia. Botsan-Kharchenko reiterated Russian support for Dayton, and for Bosnia-Herzegovina's territorial integrity. Russian support for the Bosnian state was one reason why it opposed independence for Kosovo.

¶8. (C) While supporting stronger federal institutions, Botsan-Kharchenko said that Russia opposed the High Representative Lajcak's tactics, as evidenced in his October 19 measures. Lajcak had resorted too quickly to the Bonn Powers. For reforms to be fully implemented and felt, the GOR believed that the HighRep needed to work harder to find consensus among the Bosnian leadership in order to ensure local ownership of the policies. While Lajcak's goal was to make the Council of Ministers more effective, RS opposition to the October 19 measures had the opposite effect. Botsan-Kharchenko noted parenthetically that Russia was also

unhappy over the obstacles allegedly created by the OHR (specifically referring to Lajcak's deputy) against Russian businesses in the RS.

Comment

19. (C) By hinting at differences between Tadic and Kostunica now, the GOR may be seeking to give wavering EU countries ammunition to delay ending the negotiating process before Serbian elections are held in mid-January and the subsequent government has time to engage.

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